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TAGS: OPRC, KMDR, KPAO, GM
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: BAKER BUSH-MALIKI U.S.-IRAQ MEPP POPE
LITVINENKO;BERLIN

- A. Lead Stories Summary
- B. (U.S.) Baker Commission Report
- C. (U.S.-Iraq) Bush-Maliki Meeting
- D. (U.S.-Iraq) Implications Of War
- E. (MEPP) Rice To Middle East
- F. (Vatican-Turkey) Papal Trip
- G. (Europe) Litvinenko Poisoning

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A. Lead Stories Summary

HEADLINES

Radioactive Radiation In British Aircraft (Frankfurter Allgemeine)

Turn In The Labor Market (Sueddeutsche Zeitung)

Economic Boom Creates More And More Jobs (Die Welt)

Economic Boom Results In More Regular Jobs (Frankfurter Rundschau)

Germany - A Winter's Tale (Tagesspiegel)

Fewer Than Four Million Unemployed (Berliner Zeitung)

Editorials focused on the decline in the unemployment rate and the debate over Bundeswehr mission in Darfur. ZDF-TV's early evening newscast heute and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with reports on the decline of the unemployment rate.

Iraq, Baker Panel

Sueddeutsche and other papers reported that the Baker commission will recommend a U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq. The paper also said the United States hopes to get the Sunni rebels in Iraq under control by relying on the assistance of neighboring Sunni states such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia. But the fact that Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Maliki is a Shiite and opposed to this approach reduces the chances of the initiative's success.

ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau reported that, during a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister el-Maliki, President Bush promised that the United States would stay in Iraq as long as the Baghdad government wants it to stay.

Renditions, el-Masri

In his testimony to the BND fact-finding committee, former Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND) head and current Under Secretary of the Interior August Hanning said he learned only in 2005 from newspaper reports that ex-U.S. Ambassador Coats and former Interior Minister Schily had talked in May 2004 about the kidnapping of Khaled el-Masri. He said: "I would have wished to be informed earlier" (Tagesspiegel). Several papers reported that Hanning and his successor Ernst Uhrlau rejected accusations that the BND learned of the case before el-Masri's release.

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Tagesspiegel and Berliner Zeitung refer to a report in yesterday's taz that said that the CIA kidnapped alleged al-Qaida members already between 1992 and 1995 and put them in secret prisons. The paper refers to the minutes of four confidential meeting between high-ranking EU officials with former CIA agents and U.S. legal counselor John Bellinger in Washington. The minutes also refer to close cooperation between the CIA and the intelligence services from Germany, France, and Italy.

Karpinski Interview

In an interview with stern, the former head of the Abu Ghraib prison, ex brigadier-general Janis Karpinski, said her bosses

ordered the abuse of Iraqis. She refers to the former head of the Guantanamo prison camp, General Miller, who told her they were not getting enough out of the interrogations of Iraqis in Abu Ghraib and that "we were being too nice to the prisoners." She cited Miller as having said: "You must treat the prisoners like dogs."

Other

The "Global Thermometer" opinion poll by the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute measured the warmth of U.S. voters' feeling toward 16 countries. It revealed that Americans have the warmest feeling toward Britain, Canada, and Israel. Germany comes in fourth (AP).

B. (U.S.) Baker Commission Report

1. "The Only Correct Advice"

Ewald Stein said in an editorial in business daily Handelsblatt of Duesseldorf (12/1):

"The advice will have one flaw: If the U.S. government follows it, Bush's vision of a democratization of the entire Middle East is finally turning into a bad dream. At the end of his presidency, Bush will be considered a failure on the international stage. There is a reason why Washington emphasizes that the administration by no means feels bound by the recommendation of Baker's experts. And the fact that the strategists in the Pentagon are even thinking about increasing U.S. forces in Iraq is further evidence of this view. Nevertheless, Bush cannot simply ignore the proposal. In Iraq, it is no longer the image of the American superpower that is at stake; at issue is to end a war that has now lasted more than three years and cannot be won. Baker's conclusion is not the only one but the only correct one."

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2. "Nothing New From Baker"

Business daily Financial Times Deutschland of Hamburg (12/1) noted:

"It seems that President Bush can do little with the recommendations of the Baker Commission. The result of the month-long talks will be a polished compromise that can be signed by all sides, but whose practical utility will be small. To strike a balance between the various positions, Baker will recommend leaving the matter to the Iraqis themselves.... Bush has done this for quite a while but only with moderate success.... It is likely that Bush will put Baker's report in a drawer and leave it there, and he cannot even be criticized for this. If Baker has achieved one thing, then it is this: The Democrats should now be aware that Iraq is also their problem - and that there are no quick solutions. Seen from this angle, the Commission was not superfluous."

3. Bernd Pickert argued in leftist die tageszeitung of Berlin (12/1) argued:

"What the Baker Commission is to recommend next week is now emerging: It will set up a smokescreen that will not contribute to settling the conflict but will only pacify the spin doctors on both sides of the political spectrum in the United States. The plan to reduce the U.S. contingent to 75,000 does not have a timetable; the recommendation to integrate Syria and Iran into efforts to resolve the problem has been debated all over again, even before the report is published. And thus only one thing will remain in the end: The Baker Commission will be used to support a 'stay-the course' policy that is being camouflaged as a 'change of course.'"

4. Right-of-center Saarbr|cker Zeitung (12/01) judged:

"The recommendations of the Baker Commission are also an expression of the difficult situation in which the United States finds itself.

Despite the clear victory by Democrats in the midterm elections, the solution to the Iraq conflict is possible only on a bipartisan basis. And the report is the lowest common denominator of Democrats and Republicans in the Commission. In addition, so many things are happening in Iraq right now that such a well-founded, broadly based report runs the risk of being overtaken by events...."

5. Centrist Badische Zeitung of Freiburg (12/01) concludes:

"The appeal to the Bush administration to seek assistance even from the most difficult, sorry, 'rogue,' partners, is reasonable. But it is crucial that it is the first time that a report mentions a troop withdrawal. The date has not been mentioned but is based on U.S.

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domestic policy. At the latest, when the U.S. presidential campaign begins next year, both sides will want to present a significant reduction of U.S. forces, irrespective of what has happened in Iraq by then. The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq has begun."

C. (U.S.-Iraq) Bush-Maliki Meeting

1. "Iraq's Gloomy Options"

Stefan Kornelius judged in an editorial in center-left Sueddeutsche Zeitung of Munich (12/1):

"If the United States decides to withdraw from Iraq, then the U.S. government can do whatever it wants to embellish this withdrawal, but America would leave a destroyed country and it would have to admit defeat. The Bush administration does not want to accept this judgment and is now beginning to play the 'blame game.' Iraqi Premier Maliki is the victim of the moment. He was branded by America's security advisor with the mark of Cain - as a wimp. Maliki was well advised to respond with a tit-for-tat response and cancel the first planned meeting [with Bush] in Amman.

"We have our doubts about whether Prime Minister Maliki has understood the seriousness of the situation. If the United States were to decide to withdraw troops, Maliki would be the first victim of the radicals. Why then does he permit others to make the U.S. government responsible for all the evil in the country? Ninety-one percent of Sunnis and 74 percent of Shiites desire a U.S. troop withdrawal, not because they would then get along much better but because the field would then be free for an open religious struggle.

In this jumble of different interests and destructive intentions, there is no longer a common goal that unites all factions. The simple question remains: How can the United States withdraw without Iraq drowning in blood?"

D. (U.S.-Iraq) Implications Of War

1. "The Great Failure"

Nikolaus Busse editorialized on the front page of center-right Frankfurter Allgemeine (12/1):

"Iraq stands at an abyss, and this fact cannot be sugar-coated.... This is called civil war, even though President Bush does not like this word. His most loyal ally, Tony Blair, is more honest. He described the situation in Iraq as a disaster.... Indeed, the two campaigners are faced with a pile of debris.... Three and a half years after the invasion, the only credit President Bush can get is

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that he ousted a dictator. All other war goals have failed and in some cases, the opposite of what was really desired has now happened.... The worst mistake of the failed Iraq war is one that affects not only the Arab world. There is the danger that the United States as a global power that creates order will be paralyzed and will play no role at all in certain areas. Its small and large rivals hope that the Americans, for the foreseeable future, will

not have enough soldiers or the political courage for similar invasions. That is why countries such as Iran or North Korea are now playing their games with Washington.

"And this defeat in the sensitive field of public opinion will have a lasting effect. In Arab-Muslim societies, the U.S. image will be shaped for one or two generations by the picture of the torture prison in Abu Ghraib and not by the Statue of Liberty. This will deprive the United States of its 'soft power,' the often underestimated cultural and idealistic attractiveness without which military power has little value in the era of the media and public discourse. That is why the Iraq War, which was supposed to be a demonstration of [U.S.] power, has turned into the greatest deterioration in U.S. influence since the Vietnam War.... And this weakness hits all Europeans since they are materially and intellectually unable to fill the gaps that the United States leaves on the map of trouble spots...."

E. (MEPP) Rice To Middle East

1. "A Worthwhile Stopover In Israel/Palestine"

Martina Doering observed in an editorial in left-of-center Berliner Zeitung (12/1):

"Israeli Premier Olmert announced compromises, and Palestinian President Abbas is trying to form a government of national unity. Without any help and without great expense, the United States was able to claim success in its efforts and demonstrate its engagement regarding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This was urgently necessary because the Europeans had planned to interfere in this conflict, something Washington understood as criticism of its policy. Israel/Palestine is the only ray of hope for the United States in the region because everything is going wrong in Iraq and then Iraqi Premier Maliki embarrassed President Bush with his no-show at a dinner in Amman. Ms. Rice graciously thanked Abbas for his efforts and expressed her hope that the cease-fire will hold. But she did not speak of greater support and [U.S.] engagement."

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F. (Vatican-Turkey) Papal Trip

1. Siegmund Gottlieb commented on ARD-TV's (national channel one) late evening newscast Tagesthemen (12/1):

"The Pope's very difficult trip has succeeded. There is even more: What happened during his trip to Turkey can be described as sensational, contrary to many predictions that Benedict would enter a minefield and would meet an insurmountable wall of rejection in the Islamic world.... In Turkey, the Pope reached out his hand to Islam. His visit to the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque is a historic moment...and a key point of his Pontificate...."

2. Centrist Neue Presse of Hanover (12/01) observed:

"The pictures of the papal visit have a meaning that goes beyond the Islamic world to the Arab world. They are pushing for freedom of religion. The Pope as an icon of Christianity seems to be a moral institution for Al Jazeera TV. The criticism of Islamists was full of hatred, and it reveals the extent to which the fundamentalists must have been affected by the visit. The trip of the Pope looked a bit like active repentance. His Regensburg sermon on Islam's view on violence did not promote a dialogue. But this time, the Pope was the representative of those in the West who are opposed to a clash of cultures."

3. Right-of-center M|nchener Merkur (12/01) noted:

"Stronger appeals for reconciliation and for peace are hardly

possible. It is to be hoped that those people whom radical Islamists are trying to stir up against the West will not be able to ignore the impressive power of this moment. Muslims were able to see that the Pope was not a power politician, not church leader on a crusade, but a pious man promoting peace and reconciliation."

4. Right-of-center Badisches Tagblatt of Baden-Baden (12/01) opined:

"The intellectual from the Holy See is not the great communicator that his predecessor was.... Nevertheless, he is willing to learn. Yesterday's embrace with Bartholomae was historic: In the Orthodox world, Benedict is highly esteemed as an interlocutor. That is why the German Pope could succeed in something his predecessor could not achieve - a visit to Moscow - and that means real progress in the dialogue with orthodoxy."

5. "Steadfast, Not Stubborn"

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Klaus Kramer had this to say in an editorial in left-of-center Kieler Nachrichten (12/01):

"The Pope is open to dialogue, but not at the price of giving up Catholic principles. In Turkey, Benedict was interested in narrowing differences with Muslims and orthodox Christians. He achieved this goal."

G. (Europe) Litvinenko Poisoning

1. Mysterious Trails"

Business daily Financial Times Deutschland of Hamburg (12/1) opined:

"How was it possible that this material got on board of the British Airways aircraft? Is it really that simple to bring radioactive material aboard at a time when even life-saving drugs can be taken along only in transparent plastic bags and that are limited to only a few pills? And what conclusions must we draw from the fact that the radiation was discovered in aircraft that - among other places - commute between western Europe and Moscow? Once the excitement has calmed down and once it becomes clear that there will be no victims among the passengers, we need to have a sober, new debate over security at airports. But the mysterious particles will probably not offer an indication of Litvinenko's murderers."

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